

For the physical and economic
geography of the USSR

THE SOVIET ATLAS

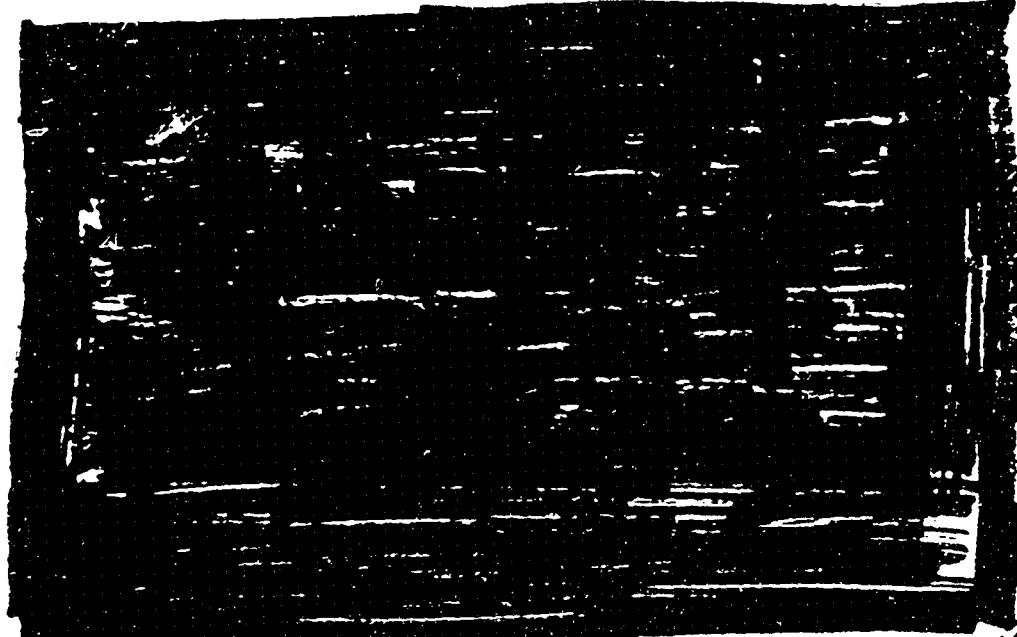
Soviet atlases, world atlases as well as those devoted to the USSR itself, have attained a degree of cartographic excellence which ranks them among the best in the world. There are no American atlases comparable to them, nor are there likely soon to be, given the concept of American publishers that an atlas is "a collection of maps in a volume."¹ The contrasting Soviet concept has been summarized by the noted Soviet cartographer K. A. Sal'dichiev: "An atlas is not just a grouping of various geographic maps nor their mechanical assemblage. It is an integral system of maps which are organically related and complement one another, a system that is governed by the purpose of the atlas and the peculiarities of its use."²

General Atlases of the USSR

The best national atlas of the Soviet Union is currently the *Atlas SSSR* published in 1962. It is a comprehensive cartographic study

¹Moore, W. C. *A Dictionary of Geography*. (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1962.)

²Sal'dichiev, K. A. (1962) *Geografiya SSSR*. (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Sotsialisticheskoy Literatury, 1957.)



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of the country and contains an excellent series of general regional maps covering the Soviet Union at scales up to 1:3,000,000. It has a physical geography section comprising various geologic, climatic, vegetational, and faunal maps and an economic geography section covering such topics as industry, agriculture, and transportation. There are also maps of the former twenty economic regions showing the distribution of different types of economic activities within each.

The Soviets have also published a number of regional atlases covering particular political units.⁴ Both these and the *Atlas SSSR* contain a wealth of physical geographic information, both general and specific. The general maps do what is expected of them—show physical and cultural features and give place names, indicate relief by shades of green ascending from sea level to shades of brown for higher elevation, give the highest elevations in each region in meters, and indicate water depth by descending shades of blue. But these are backed up by a number of specific topical maps devoted to geology (the underlying strata, tectonics, and rock types), geomorphology (terrain), climate, vegetation, soils, forests, zoogeography (types and distribution of fauna), and mineral extraction (distribution of various mining activities).

Of the topical maps, those devoted to climate give the most comprehensive coverage. The *Atlas SSSR* has eleven of them showing climatic regions, solar radiation, prevailing wind directions, seasonal air temperatures, average daily air temperature, frost-free periods, snow cover, precipitation, radiation balance, and seasonal air pressure and giving considerable detailed information in each of these categories.

The economic section of Soviet atlases, either national or regional, is broken down essentially into four topics—industry, agriculture, population, and transportation. The industrial maps have such themes as fuel and electro-energy production, ferrous and non-ferrous metallurgy, machine building and metal fabrication, chemical and petroleum products, building materials, lumber and paper production, light products manufacturing, and food production. The agricultural maps show the location and specialization of state farms, the extent

⁴ As of this writing, the following regional atlases have been published: Ukrainian SSR; Belorussian SSR; Moldavian SSR; Georgian SSR; Armenian SSR; Azerbaijan SSR; Uzbek SSR; Tselinnyy Krai; Karelian ASSR; Kustanay Oblast; Irkutsk Oblast; Kalinin Oblast; Leningrad Oblast; Moscow Oblast; Murmansk Oblast; Smolensk Oblast; Vologda Oblast; and Yaroslavl Oblast.

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of ploughed or tilled land, and the type and distribution of grain, livestock, and various other agricultural products. The population maps usually cover ethnography along with distribution and density. The transportation topic normally comprises not only roads and railroads but navigable rivers, canals, and major air lanes.

Specialized Atlases

Of the Soviet atlases entirely devoted to special topics, the best and most useful are perhaps the agricultural atlas, the railroad atlas, and the automobile road atlas.⁸ The atlas of agriculture published in 1960, giving fuller coverage and more detailed information on Soviet agriculture than the national or regional atlases, is the most comprehensive and detailed one of its kind ever published. Its more than three hundred pages are broken down into nine sections under the following subject heads: introduction to Soviet agriculture, natural physical conditions, general agricultural characteristics, agricultural pattern including amount of arable land, livestock, agriculture in the Soviet republics, gross production of agricultural commodities, harvest yields for individual areas, and conclusions concerning Soviet agricultural production compared with the rest of the world's. Although its main value is to show the type and distribution of Soviet agricultural activities, it is excellent for determining the agricultural potential of any region of the Union.

The railroad atlas portrays the regional railway networks in the various parts of the country, including such information as the distribution of facilities, traffic flow, cities and towns served, and the railway's relationship with the physical environment. The automobile atlas gives corresponding information on roads. It distinguishes between primary and secondary roads but gives neither the kind of surfacing nor the number of lanes on a road.

⁸ Respectively *Atlas Sel'skogo Khozyaistva SSSR*, Zhleznye Dorogi SSSR, and *Atlas Avtomobil'nykh Dorog SSSR* (Moskva: GUCK, 1960, 1965, and 1961.)

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